

*Rep. Israel bill requires all “public” executive branch documents to be online*

Washington, DC – On Monday, Rep. Steve Israel (D – New York) announced the introduction of groundbreaking transparency legislation that will redefine the government meaning of “public.” The Public Online Information Act (POIA)

“Every day, 78 percent of American adults use the internet. It’s become our first stop for news and research. Our government needs to catch up,” said Rep. Israel. “People across the country – from scholars to school children – should be able to see any public government information from the convenience of their computer. Public should mean online. That’s why I’m reintroducing my legislation to require that all executive branch agencies make their public documents easily available and searchable on the internet.”

The Public Online Information Act (POIA) requires executive branch agencies to publish all publicly available information on the Internet in a timely fashion and in user-friendly formats. The legislation requires each agency to establish a searchable catalog of all disclosed public documents. It also creates an advisory committee to help develop government-wide Internet publication policies. Rep. Israel previously introduced the legislation in the 111th Congress. Sen. Jon Tester (D – Montana) is introducing companion legislation in the Senate.

“Sunlight commends Senator Tester and Representative Israel for introducing legislation that follows Sunlight’s ethos that for government information to truly be considered public, it must be freely accessible online, in a format that can be downloaded and parsed by any citizen. By freeing government information from its paper silos, the Public Online Information Act gives the public what they need to participate in government as active and informed citizens,” said Ellen Miller, executive director and co-founder of the Sunlight Foundation.

Under POIA, OMB’s E-Government Administrator and CIOs at independent agencies are responsible for crafting regulations to implement POIA. The public is granted a limited private right of action (similar to that under FOIA) to guarantee that the government lives up to its

transparency obligations. There are commonsense exemptions for trade secrets, matters of national security, personal privacy and other information that is exempt from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act.

Internet disclosure of public records becomes mandatory three years after enactment of the bill. Public records generated, updated or released after enactment must be published online.

Examples of information that is required by law to be public but is not available online include:

- Reports disclosing lobbying activities (SF-LLLs) by government contractors and grantees made in connection with winning a grant.
- Filings by high-level government officials of their personal financial interests.
- Reports of when executive branch officials travel is paid for by third-parties and not the government.